PARVA Convivia III

PLOTINUS·AND·THE·ORIGINS OF·MEDIEVAL·AESTHETICS

PLOTINUS·AND THE·ORIGINS OF·MEDIEVAL AESTHETICS

TRANSLATION, INTRODUCTION & EDITING ■ ADRIEN PALLADINO

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Few are probably the scholars of medieval, Byzantine, and Late Antique art history who have never encountered the name of André Grabar (1896–1990) /ILL. 1/.[1] Born in Kiev,

1 For a biographical sketch, see Ivan FOLETTI, "André/Andrej Nikolajevič Grabar", in *Personenlexikon zur Christlichen Archäologie. Forscher und Persönlichkeiten vom 16. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert*, Stefan HEID, Martin DENNERT eds, Regensburg 2012, vol. 1, pp. 601–602. See also Maria Giovanna MUZJ, *Visione e presenza: iconografia e teofania nel pensiero di André Grabar*, Milan 1995 – I refer to the French transl., *eadem*, *Un maître pour l'art chrétien: André Grabar. Iconographie et théophanie*, transl. Charles-André BERNARD, Paris 2005; *Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo. Vizantija i Drevnjaja Rus›. K 100-letiju Andreja Nikolaeviča Grabara (1896–1990)* [Old Russian art. Byzantium and Kievan Rus'. For the 100th-birthday of Andrej Nikolajevič Grabar], Engelina S. SMIRNOVA ed., Saint Petersburg 1999, sp. pp. 9–108; Linda M. ROUILLARD, "Grabar, André (July 26, 1896, Kiev – October 5, 1990, Paris), Archaeologist and Art Historian of Classical Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Middle Ages", in *Handbook of Medieval Studies. Terms, Methods, Trends*, Albrecht CLASSEN ed., Berlin/New York 2010, vol. III, pp. 2320–2323; Marta SERRANO COLL, "André Grabar (1896–1990). The Novel Conception of Iconography", in *Rewriting the Middle Ages in the Twentieth Century*, vol. III: *Political Theory and Practice*, Julia PAVÓN BENITO ed., Turnhout 2015, pp. 197–221.

in the words of Gilbert Dagron (1932–2015), "[...] the city where Russian Christianity modelled itself on Byzantium and extended Byzantine tradition until us", the origins of Grabar seem to have instinctively led him to study artistic and religious phenomena related to images within the "Byzantine" sphere /ILL. 2/.[2] It is also what his solid Russian formation in Saint Petersburg amongst the first masters of the discipline of Byzantine art history, Nikodim Pavlovič Kondakov (1844–1925) and the latter's students Dimitri Vlas'evič Ajnalov (1862–1939) and Jakov Ivanovič Smirnov (1869–1918) would suggest.[3] However, the political and historical events following the Revolution in 1917 and an exceptional life-course also contributed to make André Grabar a figure deeply embedded between Orient and Occident, and among Byzantinists "[...] without any doubt the one who paid the most attention to the arts of the Latin West".[4] A look at his bibliography confirms this statement: with a preference for "Eastern" or "Byzantine" topics, Grabar nonetheless touched upon an impressive variety of aspects and covered a vast area of geographical territories searching

2 Gilbert DAGRON, "Préface: André Grabar (1896–1990)", in André GRABAR, *Les origines de l'esthétique médiévale*, Paris 1992, pp. 5–10, sp. 5. See also Gilbert DAGRON, "André Grabar et les images", *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, CXLIX/3 (2005), pp. 1125–1128; Henry MAGUIRE, "André Grabar. 1896–1990", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, XLV (1991), pp. XII–XV.

3 On Kondakov, see Ivan FOLETTI, *Da Bisanzio alla Santa Russia. Nikodim Kondakov (1844–1925) e la nascita della storia dell'arte in Russia*, Rome 2011, pp. 85–172. I refer to the English transl., *idem*, *From Byzantium to Holy Russia. Nikodim Kondakov (1844–1925) and the Invention of the Icon*, transl. Sarah MELKER, Rome 2017; on Ajnalov, Ludmila G. KRUSHKOVA, "Dmitrij Vlas'evič Ajnalov", in *Personenlexikon* (n. 1), vol. 1, pp. 53–54; on Smirnov, *eadem*, "Jakov Ivanovič Smirnov", in *Personenlexikon* (n. 1), vol. 2, pp. 1172–1173.

4 Yves CHRISTE, "André Grabar et l'Occident", *Comptes rendus des séances* (n. 2), pp. 1117–1123, sp. p 1117.



ILL. 2
St Sophia cathedral in Kiev, postcard, c. 1890–1900

for the traces of artistic phenomena of Late Antique and medieval culture.[5]

His attempts at understanding and bridging East and West are not so surprising when one considers that the second part his intellectual formation, from 1922 onwards, was the life of a Russian émigré in France, a path enriched notably by a constant exchange with some of the most eminent French Byzantinists of the time. On the one hand Paul Perdrizet (1870–1938) /ILL. 3/ first at Strasbourg, on the other hand Charles Diehl (1859–1944) and Gabriel Millet

(1867–1953) in Paris /ILL. 4/.[6] To some extent, despite the hardships of emigrating from Russia to Bulgaria and subsequently to France, Grabar must have felt at home in this new social and intellectual environment. Perdrizet, Diehl or Millet were, just as the Russian teachers of Grabar, part of the first international network of Byzantinists which was discussing questions related to the emergence of Byzantine art, specifically trying to understand the "oriental" or "occidental" part within this genesis.[7] Grabar had, in fact, experienced the best of the two worlds just before they would be separated by revolutions and war.

In the frame of this introduction, I would like to acquaint the reader with one of André Grabar's essential essays, entitled *Plotin et les origines de l'esthétique médiévale*, here translated to English /ILL. 5/.[8] This article was influential in the field

6 On Perdrizet, see Charles PICARD, "Éloge funèbre de M. Paul Perdrizet, membre de l'Académie", *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, LXXXII/3 (1938), pp. 270–280; on Millet, see Jean-Michel SPIESER, Judith SORIA, "Millet, Gabriel", in *Dictionnaire critique des historiens de l'art actifs en France de la Révolution à la Première Guerre mondiale*, Philippe SÉNÉCHAL, Claire BARBILLON eds, 2015 [online].

7 On the development and progressive independence of the field of "Byzantine" art history from Christian archaeology at the turn of the century, the bibliography is vast, and no exhaustive monograph exists to this day. See for example *Présence de Byzance*, Jean-Michel SPIESER ed., Gollion 2007; on the *Orient oder Rom?* question at the turn of the century, I indicate only Carola JÄGGI, "Die Frage nach dem Ursprung der christlichen Kunst: Die 'Orient oder Rom' – Debatte im frühen 20. Jahrhundert", in *Giuseppe Wilpert archeologo Cristiano*, Atti del convegno, (Roma, 16–19 maggio 2007), Stefan HEID ed., Rome 2009; *Orient oder Rom? Prehistory, History and Reception of a Historiographical Myth (1880–1930)*, Ivan FOLETTI, Francesco LOVINO eds, Rome 2018 [in press].

8 Originally printed in *Cahiers Archéologiques*, I (1945), pp. 15–34. Reprinted in André GRABAR, *L'art de la fin de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Âge*, 3 vols, Paris 1968, vol. 1, pp. 15–29; *idem*, *Les origines de l'esthétique médiévale*, Paris 1992, pp. 29–57. This



ILL. 3
Paul Perdrizet, 1908

ILL. 4
Gabriel Millet, conference at the Sorbonne

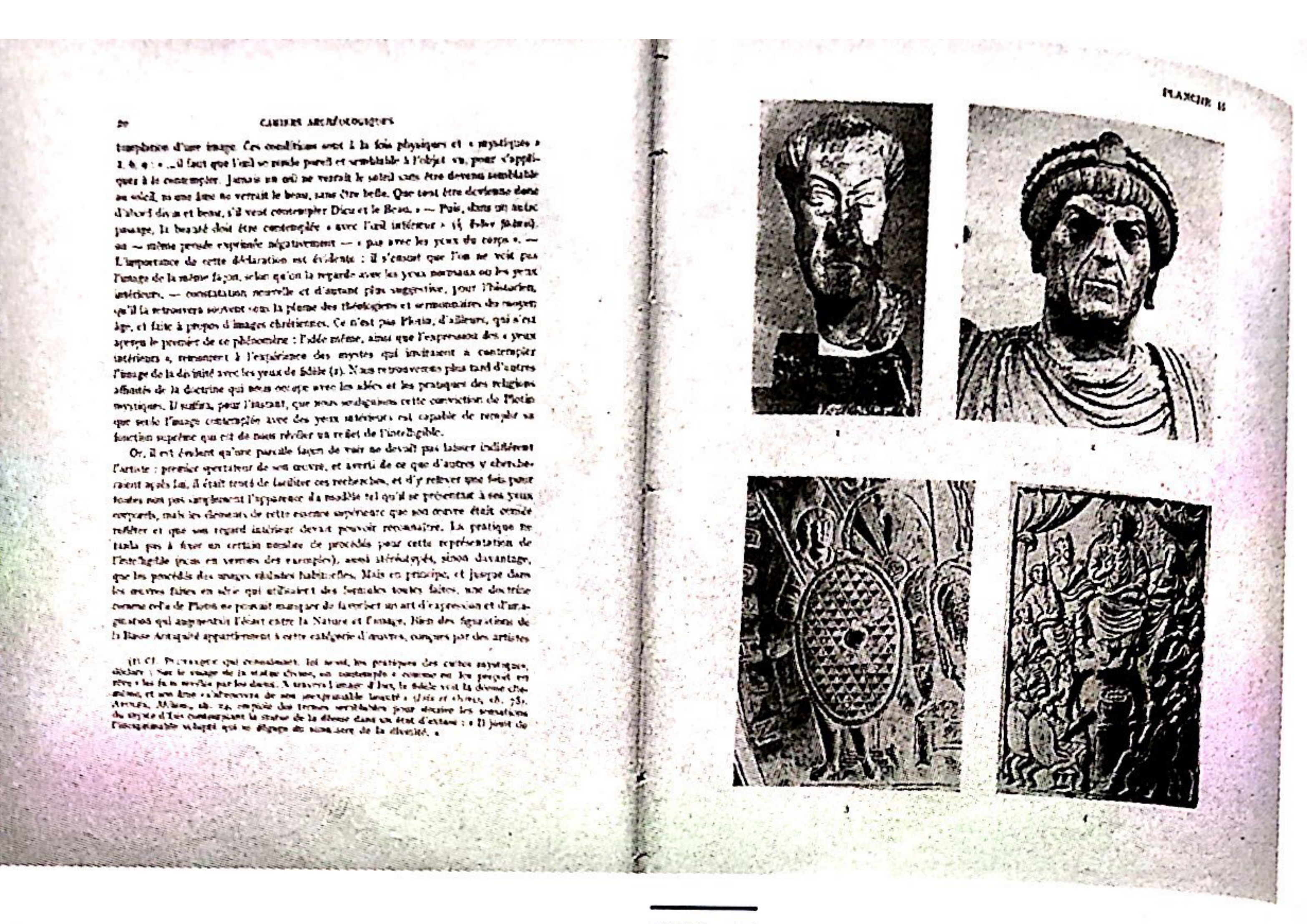
of Late Antique and Byzantine art history not only because of its content, but is also crucial when related to a historiographical framing. In order to present the essay and the figure of Grabar, I would like to follow four leading threads. I will first expound the subject of the text, its reception, its main critiques, and its position in the context of the opus of Grabar. A second moment will be dedicated to the notion of perspective", pervasive in this essay, which will be contextualised within the rediscovery of the artistic manifestations of



Byzantium. The notion will be related to the Russian context, and more broadly to the "invention" of the Russian icon as both traditional and avant-garde artform at the beginning of the twentieth century. The essay will also be briefly set in the context of the birth of the *Cahiers Archéologiques*, founded at the end of the Second World War as a new platform for art historical exchange. Lastly, I will try to highlight the legacies of the approach taken by Grabar in the essay and relate them to current research focuses of the field of art history, before asking a final question: why translate, and is it still relevant for the twenty-first century observer to view and re-examine Late Antique and medieval art with André Grabar's eyes?

AN "ICONIC" ARTICLE

As the title of the article *Plotinus and the Origins of Medieval Aesthetics* clearly announces, Grabar positioned himself within a specific branch of philosophy: aesthetics. The



20 CAHIERS ARCHÉOLOGIQUES

templation d'une image. Ces conditions sont à la fois physiques et « mystiques » (I, 6, 9) : « ...il faut que l'œil se rende pareil et semblable à l'objet vu, pour s'appliquer à le contempler. Jamais un œil ne verrait le soleil sans être devenu semblable au soleil, ni une âme ne verrait le beau, sans être belle. Que tout être devienne donc d'abord divin et beau, s'il veut contempler Dieu et le Beau. » — Puis, dans un autre passage, la beauté doit être contemplée « avec l'œil intérieur » [illegible], ou — même pensée exprimée négativement — « pas avec les yeux du corps ». — L'importance de cette déclaration est évidente : il s'ensuit que l'on ne voit pas l'image de la même façon, selon qu'on la regarde avec les yeux normaux ou les yeux intérieurs, — constatation nouvelle et d'autant plus suggestive, pour l'historien, qu'il la retrouvera souvent sous la plume des théologiens et sermonnaires du moyen âge, et faite à propos d'images chrétiennes. Ce n'est pas Plotin, d'ailleurs, qui s'est aperçu le premier de ce phénomène : l'idée même, ainsi que l'expression des « yeux intérieurs », remontent à l'expérience des mystes qui invitaient à contempler l'image de la divinité avec les yeux de fidèle (1). Nous retrouverons plus tard d'autres affinités de la doctrine qui nous occupe avec les idées et les pratiques des religions mystiques. Il suffira, pour l'instant, que nous soulignions cette conviction de Plotin que seule l'image contemplée avec des yeux intérieurs est capable de remplir sa fonction suprême qui est de nous révéler un reflet de l'intelligible.

Or, il est évident qu'une pareille façon de voir ne devait pas laisser indifférent l'artiste : premier spectateur de son œuvre, et averti de ce que d'autres y cherchaient après lui, il était tenté de faciliter ces recherches, et d'y relever une fois pour toutes non pas simplement l'apparence du modèle tel qu'il se présentait à ses yeux corporels, mais les éléments de cette essence supérieure que son œuvre était censée refléter et que son regard intérieur devait pouvoir reconnaître. La pratique ne tarda pas à fixer un certain nombre de procédés pour cette représentation de l'intelligible (nous en verrons des exemples), aussi stéréotypés, sinon davantage, que les procédés des images réalistes habituelles. Mais en principe, et jusque dans les œuvres faites en série qui utilisaient des formules toutes faites, une doctrine comme celle de Plotin ne pouvait manquer de favoriser un art d'expression et d'imagination qui augmentait l'écart entre la Nature et l'image. Bien des figurations de la Basse Antiquité appartiennent à cette catégorie d'œuvres, conçues par des artistes

(1) Cf. [illegible] qui connaissait, lui aussi, les pratiques des cultes mystiques, déclare : Sur le visage de la statue divine, on contemple « comme en [illegible] en rêve » les faces [illegible] par les dieux. À travers l'image d'Isis, le fidèle voit la déesse elle-même, et son âme s'abreuvera de son inexprimable beauté » (*Isis et Osiris*, ch. 75). Apulée, *Métam.*, ch. 24, emploie des termes semblables pour décrire les sensations du myste d'Isis contemplant la statue de la déesse dans un état d'extase : « Il jouit de l'inexprimable volupté qui se dégage du simulacre de la divinité. »

PLANCHE II

1 2 3 4

ILL. 5

Page and plate from "Plotin et les origines de l'esthétique médiévale", *Cahiers Archéologiques*, I (1945)

scholar was then forty-nine years old, already a confirmed scholar of the field of Byzantine art history, and one year from his nomination at the Chair of Early Christian and Byzantine Archaeology at the *Collège de France*. In the essay, he chose a very broad subject, the origins of medieval "aesthetics", framing it within a clearly defined body of text, the *Enneads*. The latter were

with the perception of art or with the representation of the intelligible in particular. The usual breadth of the writings of Plotinus on art, especially his doctrines on the rejection of materiality and the intelligible contemplation of things are, as a matter of fact, used in many different fields, ranging from ancient philosophy to contemporary art theory. As such, the *Enneads* appeared to some scholars as an optimal "blank page" on which ideas – or ideologies – could be laid, according to contexts, epochs, and fields.[9] It is thus no surprise that the theory developed by the Late Antique philosopher has been extensively used in order to explain philosophical, cultural, visual, religious, or aesthetic traits related in particular to early Christianity and to the "Byzantine sphere".[10] Framed specifically in art historical research, the *Enneads* thematise one of the field's transversal questions: the dichotomy between mimesis and reality. According to Plotinus, visual arts do not (or should not) barely imitate visible objects produced by nature but are rather inspired

9 For example, the collective volume *Neoplatonism and Western Aesthetics*, Aphrodite ALEXANDRAKIS, Nicholas H. MOUTAFAKIS eds, Albany, NY 2002; Thomas LEINKAUF, "Überlegungen zum Status des Bildes und der Kunst bei Plotin", in *Zur Erscheinung kommen. Bildlichkeit als theoretischer Prozess*, Anne EUSTERSCHULTE, Wiebke-Marie STOCK eds, Hamburg 2016, pp. 23–36; for the use of Plotinus in the frame of Christian Late Antiquity, see Stéphane BIGHAM, "L'incontro di nuove visioni: la fede Cristiana e Plotino", in *Genealogia dell'immagine Cristiana. Studi sul cristianesimo antico e le sue raffigurazioni*, Daniele GUASTINI ed., Florence/Lucca 2014, pp. 108–121; Pietro DEL SOLDÀ, "Il tramonto di mimesis per Plotino e i primi cristiani", *ibidem*, pp. 122–133; see also Ewgenij V. BARABANOW, "Ästhetik des Frühchristentums", *Theologische Quartalschrift*, CLVI (1976), pp. 259–276; in general on the notion of Early Christian Aesthetics and Plotinus, see Paul Corby FINNEY, "Aesthetics", in *The Eerdmans Encyclopedia of Early Christian Art and Archaeology*, 3 vols, *idem* ed., Grand Rapids 2017, vol. 1, pp. 16–17.

10 For example, *Byzantine Perspectives on Neoplatonism*, Sergei MARIEV ed., Boston/Berlin 2017.

more directly – and thus more perfectly – by intelligible models. Within the possible uses of the textual material inherited from Plotinus, it is specifically this notion related to the representation of the intelligible, the ineffable contact with the Νοῦς (Intelligence or Spirit), that André Grabar was reflecting upon when he published his paper in 1945.[11]

Grabar was indeed looking in Plotinus for a guide. A guide on how to look at Late Antique art, and especially this intelligible aspect, the intellectual as opposed to the sensible vision. In this process, Grabar uses the philosopher to claim that Late Antique and subsequently medieval imagery were much more straightforward in the relationship they established with the beholder. He argues, in fact, that they did not presuppose the addition of successive knowledge but should instead be aiming at direct and total knowledge. This fact is interesting, Grabar goes on, since it could provide us with information on the way images had to be developed by the artists. In order to give access to direct knowledge, they had to invent and settle strict and artificial conventions, which would allow the definition of the sacred by means of the visual arts, in such a way as to give access to the intelligible vision. Before everything else, the article of Grabar therefore speaks about the invention of figurative languages capable to achieve this intention.

It goes without saying that these languages, since they most of the time deliberately refuse to imitate material reality, are also going against the canons established from the

11 On the composite background of the text but the unique tonality binding together the *Enneads*, see Pierre HADOT, *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard*, Paris 1997, sp. pp. 13–22.

sixteenth and throughout the nineteenth century by the incipient field of art history.[12] Considering art as a means of access and not as an end for creating illusion, Grabar asks the reader of the essay to take the philosophical frame composed by Plotinus as an invitation to look differently, or rather – in Plotinian terms – to look "beyond the appearances" of Late Antique art. Approaching artworks in the "[...] philosophical and religious value he [Plotinus] attributes to vision" permits to Grabar to understand not only the shift of aesthetics occurring during Late Antiquity within another paradigm than that of stylistic decadence, but also a shift in the very function of images. To the illusion of presence proposed by classical art, images conceived according to "Plotinian" principles should reproduce essential notions of the intelligible, thus conveying the perception of real presence. This further allowed Grabar to place the focus of his essay not only on the creation of artworks, but also to open to the questions of representation and perception.[13] After this general introduction on the fundamental traits of Plotinian philosophy related to contemplation, Grabar recognises and formulates six principles following Plotinian ideas which should allow,

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12 Since Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574), but as an early example, consider the aesthetic criteria of viewing ancient art promoted by Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768) in the second half of the eighteenth century, see Édouard POMMIER, *Winckelmann, inventeur de l'histoire de l'art*, Paris 2003. For a more general overview of the history of the discipline, see Udo KULTERMANN, *Geschichte der Kunstgeschichte. Der Weg einer Wissenschaft*, 2nd rev. ed., Munich 1996.

13 All crucial questions, for which one can still consult the studies of Ernst H. GOMBRICH, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, New York 1960; on the topic and the term of "representation", so often summoned in art history, see also the important article of Carlo GINZBURG, "Représentation: le mot, l'idée, la chose", *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, (1991), pp. 1219–1234.

PUBLICATIONS DE LA FACULTÉ DES LETTRES
DE L'UNIVERSITÉ DE STRASBOURG

Fascicule 75.

ANDRÉ GRABAR

MAITRE DE CONFÉRENCES
D'HISTOIRE DE L'ART ET DE LA CIVILISATION DE BYZANCE
A L'UNIVERSITÉ DE STRASBOURG

L'EMPEREUR
DANS L'ART BYZANTIN

RECHERCHES
SUR L'ART OFFICIEL DE L'EMPIRE D'ORIENT



EN DÉPOT A LA LIBRAIRIE
LES BELLES LETTRES
95, BOULEVARD RASPAIL
PARIS (VIe)

1936

ILL. 6

Frontpage of *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin*, Paris 1936

Roman church of Santa Maria Maggiore, without forgetting an inevitable detour through Constantinople.

This very broad range in temporality and choice of monuments, linked with the quantity of possible interpretations of Plotinian philosophical thought applied to images, has led to some of the main critiques formulated against Grabar's undertaking. For example, Daniele Guastini wrote, probably to some extent rightly, that Grabar considered only one step of the development of Christian artistic forms, that is the moment related to the earliest forms of "Byzantine art". Guastini then argued that, being Russian, Grabar could consider this "Byzantine" phase as the only true form of Christian art but was however not looking at the earlier phases of its manifestation, the one which was created in continuity with classical Roman tradition:

> Here lies – if we can express it this way – Grabar's mistake: to have believed that the Christian eye was, in fact, the Neoplatonic eye and that everything stemming from Christianity which was not belonging to this culture was a step on the way of decadence of ancient art. In this way, but at another level, he reintroduced the classicist idea of decline.[14]

In another line, one of the main critiques of Grabar's essay was formulated in 1951 by Panayotis A. Michelis in an article on the aesthetics of Byzantine art. According to

14 Daniele GUASTINI, "Aux origines de l'art paléochrétien", *Images Re-vues*, VII (2009), [online]; Guastini also came back to the question of the representation of the invisible in *idem*, "Voir l'invisible. Le problème de l'*eikon* de la philosophie grecque à la théologie chrétienne", *Images Re-vues*, VIII (2011), [online].

Michelis, Grabar had turned Plotinus' "[...] metaphysics into physics" and ascribed him "[...] intentions and suggestions on technique, of which he himself must have been utterly unaware".[15] Grabar however clearly underlined in the article that: "It goes without saying that the ideas of Plotinus exerted absolutely *no influence* on the activity of the artists of his time and of the following epoch." Further, when the essay on Plotinus was reprinted in a collection of his articles published in 1968, it was inserted in a section titled "Doctrine and Ideas", where Grabar clarified once again that the philosopher is but "[...] a particularly discerning witness and *not the actual inspirer* of medieval art".[16] As framed by Grabar, Plotinus has thus to be understood not strictly as a theoretician of medieval aesthetics, but rather as a guide who can help not only to understand the genesis of Christian art but also the various shifts in aesthetics between the classical Antique and the Early Christian world. But not all of the art of this period, since, as Guastini remarks, Grabar in some sense excluded for example the art of the catacombs or of the sarcophagi created in continuity with the Roman world. Rather, he looked especially towards the potency of certain kinds of images and their ability to ease or achieve a presentification of the intelligible.

The other point on which Grabar was contested is related to a question he expanded upon on different occasions, and which lies also at the core of the article here translated: the question of the power and frontality of images. Grabar had already widely discussed his opinions on the origins and specific potential of frontal images in the publication which first brought him renown, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin* (1936) /ILL. 6/.[17] In this book, he stated a filiation, or at least an impact, of Late Antique imperial representations and Early Christian art of the Constantinian and later eras. The thesis was most notably rebutted by Thomas F. Mathews in *The Clash of Gods* (1993).[18] Mathews notably stressed the fact that Grabar was born in Russia in 1896 under the reign of the last Tsar Nicholas II (r. 1896–1917), to a father who was senator and as such an official of the imperial regime. More specifically because of the already-mentioned monograph on imperial art, which was followed by the chairing of a 1950-Symposium at the Dumbarton Oaks Centre in Washington entitled "The Emperor and the Palace", Mathews suggested that Grabar and other scholars who had witnessed the downfall of imperial dynasties, could have nourished what he called a "[...] nostalgia for lost empire".[19] Having emigrated, Mathews argued, Grabar could only entertain this feeling, which would have naturally led him to express theories about this continuity and preponderance of imperial art within the new Christian frame. These pages of Mathews

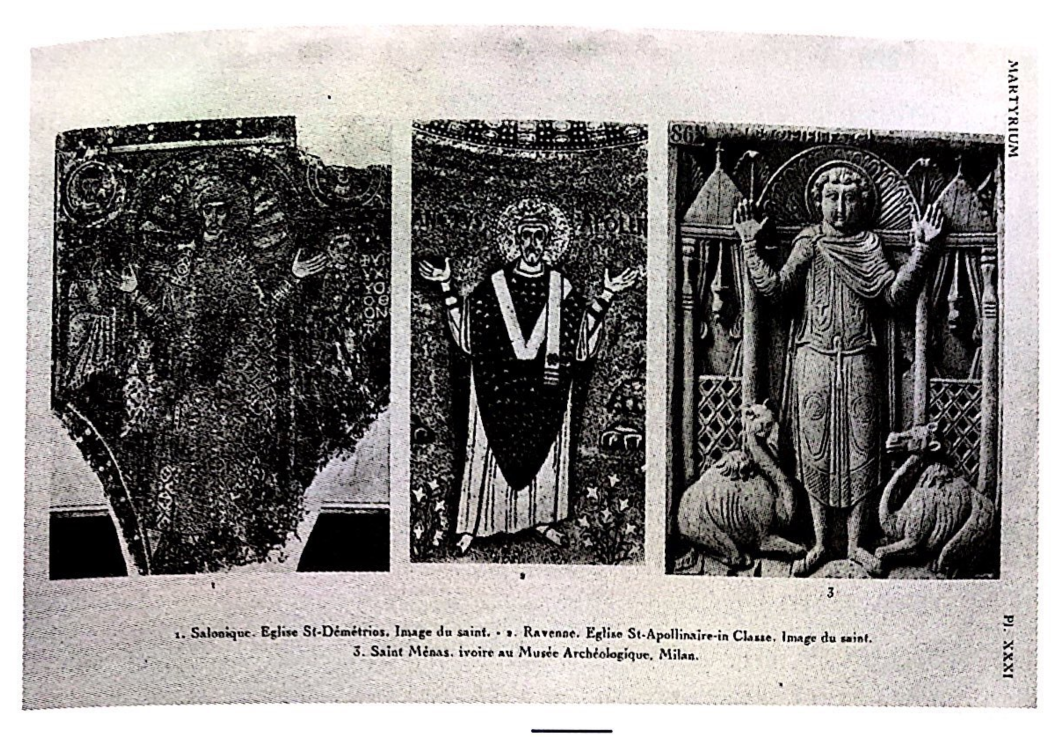
17 André GRABAR, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin. Recherches sur l'art officiel de l'Empire d'Orient*, Paris 1936.
18 Thomas F. MATHEWS, *The Clash of Gods. A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*, Princeton, NJ 1993, pp. 16–22; 2nd rev. ed. Princeton, NJ 1999.
19 *Ibidem*, p. 19. See also MUZJ, *Un maître* (n. 1), pp. 178–191.

stirred controversy and provoked many discussions, some of them particularly lively.[20] Mathews' assumption indeed seems too univocal, as no trait of Grabar's work point towards this form of imperial nostalgia. More interestingly for the argument developed here, it has to be noted that Grabar arrived at questions relative to the representations of images conveying power not exclusively through the lens of imperial iconography. As in the article here translated, he also did so through questions pertaining to the representation of the true reality as expressed in Neoplatonic thought, but also through the study of spaces and images accompanying the cult of martyrs especially in his other great two-volume study *Martyrium* (1946) /ILL. 7/.[21] The latter and the article on Plotinus were conceived and written during the war and are indeed closely related, as Grabar himself stated.[22] They are especially tied together on the important question of the "face-to-face" encounter with the image and the divinity itself, whose roots, Grabar argues, are to be found in the mystery religions of "Eastern" divinities like Isis-Osiris,

20 Mathews' reception has been discussed in a preface to the Italian translation, see Eugenio RUSSO, "Per leggere 'The Clash of Gods. A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art' di Thomas F. Mathews", in *Scontro di Dei. Una reinterpretazione dell'arte paleocristiana*, transl. Alessandro DELL'AIRA, Eugenio RUSSO, Milan 2005, pp. IX–L; see also Anne-Orange POILPRÉ, "Bilan d'une décennie de réactions à l'ouvrage de Thomas F. Mathews, *Clash of Gods*, Princeton, 1993", *Antiquité tardive*, XIII (2005), pp. 377–385.

21 André GRABAR, *Martyrium. Recherches sur le culte des reliques et l'art chrétien antique*, 2 vols, Paris 1946. Grabar came back to this study, reacting to the remarks of several Anglo-Saxon authors in *idem*, "Martyrium ou 'vingt ans après'", *Cahiers archéologiques*, XVIII (1968), pp. 239–244. On the relationships between the text on Plotinus and *Martyrium*, see also MUZJ, *Un maître* (n. 1), pp. 125–129.

22 Already in the text about Plotinus; GRABAR, *Martyrium* (n. 21), II, pp. 192–193, n. 4; *idem*, *L'art de la fin de l'Antiquité* (n. 8), vol. 1, p. 5.



ILL. 7

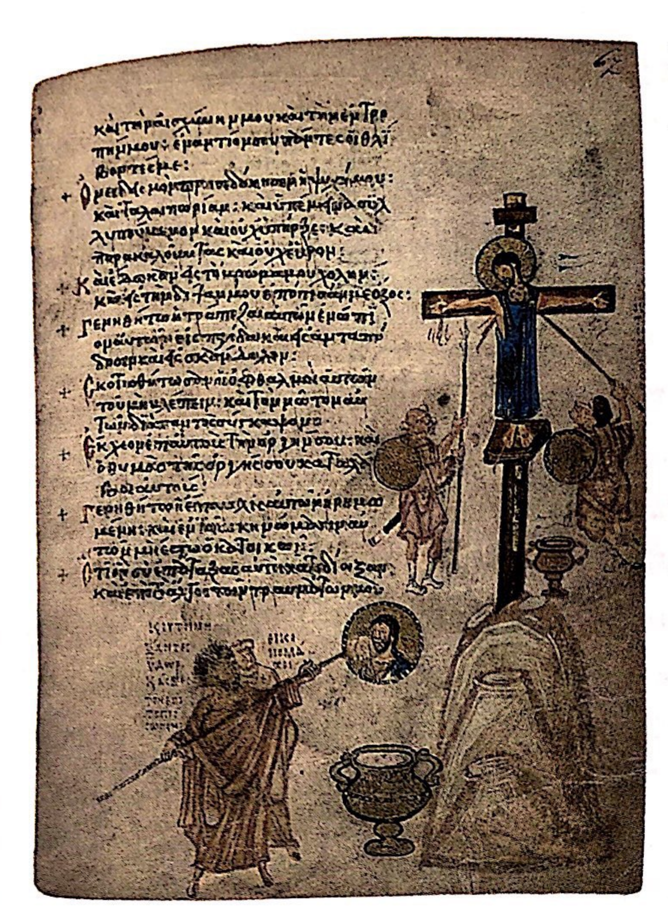
Plate XXXI from *Martyrium. Recherches sur le culte des reliques et l'art chrétien antique*, Paris 1946

Attis, or Mithras.[23] This is where we come across a search for the origins of the tradition of Christian cult image, which, according to Grabar was first taken from religious manifestations peculiar to the Levant, Egypt, or Syria, within what he calls "the half-Greek, half-local art practised there". In any case, the goal (and power) of such images lies in the immediate contemplation of the divinity through the vision of images and on the central notion of the use of the "eyes of the mind". We come back to this question later, but it is clear that the chain of thought started by Grabar with the

23 These questions can be found, further developed, in GRABAR, *Martyrium* (n. 21), II, pp. 133ff and some years later by Ulrich RAPP, *Das Mysterienbild*, Münsterschwarzach 1952.

study of these topics is closely related to what has been called the "power", "performance", or "agency" of images.[24] The study of these phenomena related to images would result for Grabar in researches on the possible negation of this power, a notion which he studied in particular by focusing on a key-moment of struggle with images: the Byzantine iconoclasm /ILL. 8/.[25]

It is therefore within this fundamental frame of understanding the presence of power or divinity through images that the three main books of Grabar on the representations of the emperors, the martyrs, and on Iconoclasm have to be inscribed.[26] The brief text on Plotinus appears as a very coherent way to access the dense and permanently stimulating corpus on images developed by Grabar over the years. A brief outline of his research focuses also shows that Mathews was mistaken to reduce its frame only to the imperial aspects of



ILL. 8
Iconoclasts, from the Chludov Psalter, ca 850–875, fol. 67r, Constantinople / Moscow, State Historical Museum, MS D. 129

Late Antique art. Even a re-reading of *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin*, with all the flaws that time has dredged up, does not appear to be the ideologically-biased book of a Russian émigré nostalgic for a lost empire.[27] I would even add that if there really is something "Russian" within André Grabar's work, it is surely elsewhere, perhaps in this attention for presence through and of cult images, that one should look for it.

27 A conception which is perpetuated, for example, by DEL SOLDÀ, "Il tramonto" (n. 9), pp. 128–133; on Grabar and Russian art, another topic than the one addressed here, see for example Engelina S. SMIRNOVA, "Andrej Nikolaevič Grabar i voprosy russkoj kul'tury v ego naučnom nasledii", [Andrej Grabar and Problems of Russian Culture in his Scholarly Heritage], in *Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo* (n. 1), pp. 76–82; Olga MEDVEDKOVA, "André Grabar et la filiation entre l'art antique, l'art byzantin et russe ancien dans l'historiographie russe", *Revue des études slaves*, LXXXVII/1 (2016) [online].

In his art historical formulation of the principles recognised in Plotinus, Grabar is part of a discourse initiated at the beginning of the twentieth century by theoreticians of art history, which was still looking to establish itself as an objective science. Grabar indeed brings back a lot of Plotinus' philosophical questions specifically for the use of perspective and its different modalities. Particularly in the above-mentioned principles recognised in Plotinus, Grabar identifies two types of construction of space: "radiant" and "reverse" perspective. The latter especially has a long conceptual history which was certainly not unfamiliar to the scholar which had been formed in Saint Petersburg.[28] In reading this essay, this term deserves to be contextualised in a more closely historiographical perspective, since it lies at the intersection between scientific discourse and philosophical-theological implications on how to look at images. This point is relevant to the historiography of art history in general and Byzantine art specifically, while also being linked with questions related to the rediscovery of the

28 The notion has notably been studied by Rudolf ARNHEIM, "Inverted Perspective in Art: Display and Expression", *Leonardo*, V/2 (1972), pp. 125–135; Clemena ANTONOVA, "On the Problem of 'Reverse Perspective': Definitions East and West", *Leonardo*, XLIII/5 (2010), pp. 464–469; *eadem*, *Space, Time, and Presence in the Icon: Seeing the World with the Eyes of God*, Ashgate 2009; Clemena ANTONOVA, Martin KEMP, "'Reverse Perspective': Historical Fallacies and Alternative View", in *The Visual Mind II*, Michelle EMMER ed., Cambridge, Mass. 2005, pp. 399–431; see also Christopher R. LAKEY, "Review of: Clemena Antonova, *Space, Time* (n. 28) and *Visualizing Medieval Performance: Perspectives, Histories, Contexts*, Elina GERTSMAN ed., Aldershot 2008", *Oxford Art Journal*, XXXIV/2 (2011), pp. 287–309.

Russian icon in the first two decades of twentieth century, a phenomenon most indebted to Nikodim P. Kondakov.[29] I do not wish to enter too deeply into a topic which has been extensively researched, but I would like to try highlighting some elements and explain how Grabar maybe indirectly suggests a link between Late Antique art and the contemplation of icons.[30]

To start, it is interesting to note that one of Grabar's "Western" teachers, Gabriel Millet, as early as 1899, in his study on the twelfth-century mosaic decoration of the Daphni monastery in central Greece, analysed the different types of perspectives

29 See notably Nikodim P. KONDAKOV, "O naučnyx zadačax istorii drevne-russkogo iskusstva" [On the scientific objectives of the history of ancient Russian art], in *Pamjatniki drevnej pismennosti i iskusstva* [Monuments of ancient writing and art], Saint Petersburg 1899, pp. 1–47; Pavel MURATOV, "Russkaja živopis' do serediny XVII veka'" [Russian painting up to the mid seventeenth century], in *Istoria russkogo iskusstva* [History of Russian Art], Igor E. GRABAR ed., Moscow 1914, vol. IV, pp. 5–406; Also after his exile, see the important work on the Icon, first published in abridged English edition, Nikodim P. KONDAKOV, *The Russian Icon*, Oxford 1927; *idem*, *Russkaja Ikona* [The Russian Icon], 4 vols, Prague 1928–1933; On the context, see FOLETTI, *From Byzantium* (n. 3); see also Wendy SALMOND, "Ellis H. Minns and Nikodim Kondakov's *The Russian Icon* (1927)", in *Modernism and the Spiritual in Russian Art. New Perspectives*, Louise HARDIMAN, Nicola KOZICHAROW eds, Cambridge 2017, pp. 165–194.

30 Xénia MURATOVA, "La riscoperta delle icone russe e il 'revival' bizantino", in *Arti e storia del Medioevo*, vol. IV: *Il Medioevo al passato e al presente*, Enrico CASTELNUOVO, Giuseppe SERGI eds, Turin 2004, pp. 589–606; Xénia MURATOVA, "Per la storia dell'arte medievale in Russia. Gli inizi: collezionisti, amatori, scrittori, eruditi, editori, primi storici d'arte", in *Medioevo: arte e storia*, (Atti del convegno internazionale di studi, Parma, 18–22 settembre 2007), Arturo C. QUINTAVALLE, Parma 2008, pp. 120–130; *eadem*, "Pavel Muratov historien d'art en Occident", in *La Russie et l'Occident. Relations intellectuelles et artistiques au temps des révolutions russes*, Ivan FOLETTI ed., Rome 2010, pp. 65–95; Ivan FOLETTI, "L'exposition des icônes de 1913 à Saint-Pétersbourg: la découverte des origines chrétiennes russes", in *Re-thinking, Re-making, Re-living Christian Origins*, Ivan FOLETTI [*et al.*] eds, Rome 2018, pp. 323–330.

adopted by "Byzantine" artists.[31] Combining these types, increasing height and receding lines, Millet argues that probably, "[...] the mosaicist of Daphni had some notions of linear perspective [...]; in fact he places the skyline very high or employs two perspectives: the view of Jerusalem seems to be taken in bird's-eye-view."[32] Further, we understand that this use of perspective is negatively connotated for Millet, as it reveals that the Byzantine artist was no longer able to understand the Antique way of using perspective: "The Byzantines, having returned to the first tradition, inherited the methods of Pompeii, without attaching any price to it, without understanding their meaning. They used them with a lordly clumsiness [*une maladresse de grands seigneurs*]."[33] It is the same "depreciative" use of "reverse" perspective as that in Dimitri V. Ajnalov's dissertation "Ellinističeskie osnovy vizantiiskogo iskusstva" [The Hellenistic Origins of Byzantine Art] (1900).[34] In this text the Russian scholar, pupil of Kondakov and teacher of Grabar, wanted to prove that the classical tradition was transmitted to posterity and thus preserved by Byzantine art. However, taking note of a problematic use of perspective in the compositions illuminated in the tenth-century Ečmiadzin Gospels, Ajnalov

31 Gabriel MILLET, *Le monastère de Daphni. Histoire, architecture, mosaïques*, (Monuments de l'art byzantin, I), Paris 1899.

32 *Ibidem*, p. 99.

33 *Ibidem*, p. 103.

34 Dimitri V. AJNALOV, "Ellinističeskie osnovy vizantiiskogo iskusstva. Issledovanija v oblasti rannevizantiiskogo iskusstva", *Zapiski Imperatorskogo Russkogo Arkheologičeskogo obščestva*, n. s. XII, 3–4 (1900–1901). Widely made available, with a preface by Cyril Mango, more images and extended by marginal notes of Ajnalov himself only in 1961 as *idem*, *The Hellenistic Origins of Byzantine Art*, Cyril MANGO ed., transl. Elizabeth SOBOLEVITCH, Serge SOBOLEVITCH, New Brunswick 1961.

argued that "[...] in this particular case one might be inclined to ascribe this to incompetent draughtsmanship or to the use of reverse perspective",[35] before trying to understand the possible architectural origins of the illuminations. When applied to Late Antique or Byzantine art at the turn of the century, the question of reverse perspective is associated to a lack, or rather to a loss, of skill of the artists: they are deemed unable to make correct foreshortenings while following the Hellenistic models.

However, a change to this notion seems to arrive in the same years. The first to coin the term of "reverse perspective" was the Byzantinist Oskar Wulff (1864–1946).[36] In an essay titled "Die umgekehrte Perspektive und die Niedersicht" [The inverted perspective and the low eye level perspective] (1907) /ILL. 9/, he used the term to characterise different types of perspectives used sometimes concurrently by ancient art: bird's-eye-view, frontal view, and, interestingly, "inner contemplation" (*innere Anschauung*). The latter is actually the same as what Grabar describes as "radiant".[37] Wulff goes on to argue that these types of perspectives dominated a whole millennium of Byzantine artistic tradition. The most important

35 AJNALOV, *The Hellenistic Origins* (n. 34), pp. 100–104.

36 Martin DENNERT, "Oskar Constantin Wulff", in *Personenlexikon* (n. 1), vol. 2, pp. 1332–1333. Wulff was also an important protagonist in the *Orient oder Rom* debate, and a friend of Josef Strzygowski, see Barbara SCHELLEWALD, "Der Blick auf den Osten – eine Kunstgeschichte à part. Oskar Wulff und Adolph Goldschmidt an der Friederich-Wilhelms-Universität und die Folgen nach 1945", in *In der Mitte Berlins: 200 Jahre Kunstgeschichte an der Humboldt-Universität*, Horst BREDEKAMP, Adam S. LABUDA eds, Berlin 2010, pp. 207–228.

37 Oskar WULFF, "Die umgekehrte Perspektive und die Niedersicht. Eine Raumanschauungsform der altbyzantinischen Kunst und ihre Fortbildung in der Renaissance", in *Kunstwissenschaftliche Beiträge August Schmarsow gewidmet*, Heinrich WEIZSÄCKER [*et al.*] eds, Leipzig 1907, pp. 1–40.

general conclusion we can draw considering the modalities of representation, Wulff says, is that "[...] the real signification of a form of representation can only be deciphered through psychological analysis".[38] His examination of the continuity and discontinuity of "reverse perspective" further confirmed for the scholar on the one hand that the "*Völkerpsychologie*" could be used as a methodological tool in art history – going against the idea of a purely individual artistic creation –, on the other confirms the "[...] law of continuity of all development of art".[39] Uniting a psychological approach and positivist art history, Wulff in this sense demonstrates that he was truly a man of the beginning of the nineteenth century. As pointed out by Clemena Antonova and Charles Lock,[40] Wulff's essay was never well received in Germany, probably because of its dismissal in the famous essay "Die Perspektive als 'symbolische Form'" [Perspective as Symbolic Form], published in German in 1927 by Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968) and based on a rebuttal of Wulff's theses formulated by mathematician Karl Doehlemann (1864–1926) in 1910.[41] Doehlemann argued that art ignorant of the idea of linear perspective (as

38 WULFF, "Die umgekehrte Perspektive" (n. 37), p. 33.

39 *Ibidem*. For some notions on *Völkerpsychologie*, see Wan-Chi WONG, "Retracing the footsteps of Wilhelm Wundt: explorations in the disciplinary frontiers of psychology and in Völkerpsychologie", *History of Psychology*, XII/4 (2009), pp. 229–265.

40 ANTONOVA, "On the problem" (n. 28); Charles LOCK, "What is Reverse Perspective and who was Oskar Wulff? Essay-review of: Antonova, *Space, Time* (n. 28) and Avril PYMAN, *Pavel Florensky: A Quiet Genius. The Tragic and Extraordinary Life of Russia's Unknown da Vinci*, London/New York 2010", *Sobornost. Eastern Christian Review*, XXXIII/1 (2011), pp. 60–89.

41 Erwin PANOFSKY, "Die Perspektive als 'symbolische Form'", in *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg. Vorträge 1924–1925*, Fritz SAXL ed., Leipzig/Berlin 1927, pp. 258–330; Karl DOEHLEMANN, "Zur Frage der sogenannten 'umgekehrten Perspektive'", *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, XXXIII (1910), pp. 85–87.

developed in the early modern period most notably by Leon Battista Alberti) cannot, a fortiori, act within an intellectual frame of "reversing" this perspective.

Instead it was shown that "reverse perspective" was popularised by the writings of Pavel Florensky (1882–1937) /ILL. 10/, the "Russian Da Vinci", who wrote specifically about the viewing of Russian icons.[42] His text, "Obratnaja perspektiva" [Reverse Perspective], has a long history. It stems from a lecture given in 1920 in Moscow, but was only published in 1967, three decades after the death of its author in the prison camp of Solovki.[43] Florensky's text deals with important questions developed on many levels during those years in Russian intellectual circles. Art historical theoretical discourse was in opposition to the idea of time and space, and perspective was therefore a question at the heart of the conceptualisation of images and much discussed.[44] Some Russian theoreticians, such as Vladimir Favorsky (1886–1964), relying on the use of reverse perspective, defined the "Byzantine" plane as the only one on which time could be configured by simultaneously making visible the past and present, lateral and distant aspects of objects – thus linking theological and pictorial aspects of icon paintings.[45] Florensky, in his essay,

42 On Florensky, see PYMAN, *Pavel Florensky* (n. 40).

43 Pavel FLORENSKY, "Obratnaja perspektiva", *Trudy po znakovim sistemam*, III (1967), pp. 381–416. English translation as "Reverse perspective (1920)", in Pavel FLORENSKY, *Beyond visions. Essays on the Perception of Art*, Nicoletta MISLER ed., transl. Wendy SALMOND, London 2002, pp. 197–272. On this history of the text, *ibidem*, pp. 199–200; ANTONOVA, *Space, Time* (n. 28), *passim*; Nadia PODZEMSKAIA, "'La vision est aussi un art': le débat sur l'espace dans la Russie soviétique du début des années 1920 et l'enseignement aux Vhutemas", *Ligeia*, LXXIII–LXXVI (2007), pp. 132–149, sp. pp. 145ff.

44 *Ibidem*.

45 *Ibidem*, p. 149.

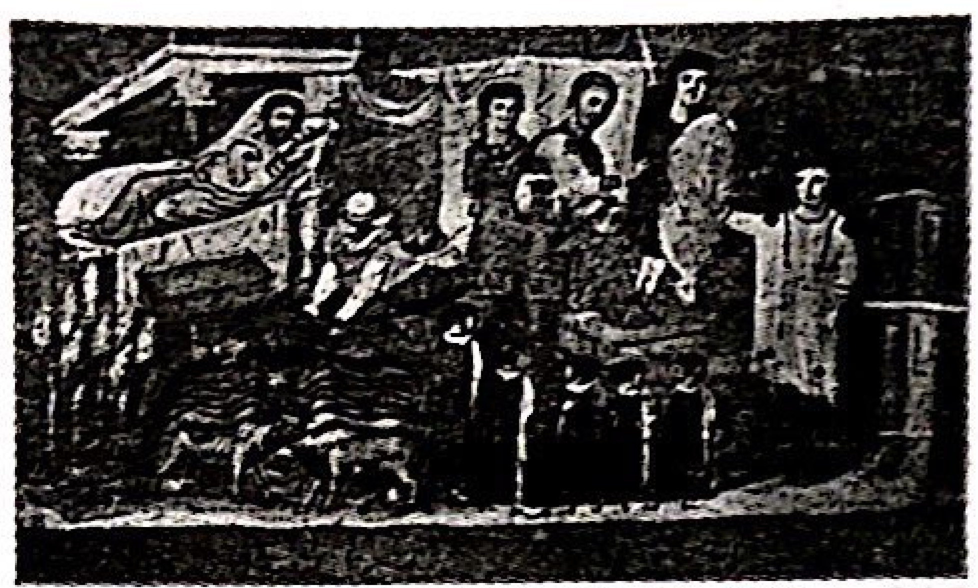


Abb. 1. Pharaos Traum und Josephs Traumdeutung. Wiener Genesis.

DIE UMGEKEHRTE PERSPEKTIVE UND DIE NIEDERSICHT

EINE RAUMANSCHAUUNGSFORM DER ALTBYZANTINISCHEN KUNST UND IHRE FORTBILDUNG IN DER RENAISSANCE

VON OSKAR WULFF

> [illegible]
> W. Dilthey (Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung, S. [illegible])

Im Folgenden soll von einer Reihe genetisch zusammenhängender räumlicher Darstellungsformen die Rede sein, auf die bisher wohl nur im einzelnen hier und da ein Streiflicht gefallen ist. Der beschränkte Raum und manche andere Fessel verwehrt mir, die späteren Phasen der Entwicklung eingehender zu verfolgen. Dennoch glaube ich, dem Forscher, der uns auch als Lehrer stets die Aufgabe vor Augen gehalten hat, in den Einzelerscheinungen die Gesetze zu suchen, nach denen sich das Kunstschaffen vollzieht, einen besseren Dankeszoll heute nicht darbieten zu können, als die schon gereiften Ergebnisse fortgesetzten Nachdenkens über diese Probleme. Verbindet doch auch jene Kette der Gebilde das zentrale Gebiet seiner Spezialforschung mit dem entlegneren, auf das Lebensgang und logische Folge wissenschaftlicher Arbeit mich gewiesen haben.

Albrecht Dürer hat auf dem Allerheiligenbilde sich selbst in ganz kleinem Maßstabe unter der Wolke, welche die zur Seligkeit Eingegangenen trägt, auf sanft ansteigendem Ufergelände eines Flusses stehend abgebildet. Die Absicht, das Himmlische nah und groß, das Irdische fern und klein erscheinen zu lassen, drängt sich dem naiven wie dem kritischen Beschauer auf. Wir möchten um nichts diesen schmalen Erdenstreifen missen, ohne den das Geheimnis, das sich droben den Augen der Seligen enthüllt,

therefore considered

mistake of naïve artists who forgot naturalistic tradition but becomes "an organic and dynamic counter conception to linear perspective".[48]

Without delving too deeply into Florensky's text, it is difficult not to make a more or less direct association with the ideas that we can find developed by Grabar and the anti-mimetic vision he recognises in Plotinus. And indeed, it is not only in this Russian intellectual context that Grabar was educated, but the writings of Florensky and others had awakened the more general interest of scholars, avant-garde painters, and amateurs to what was, in those years, being rediscovered as the Russian image *par excellence* – the icon.[49] This rediscovery of the "primitives" was accompanied, as several scholars have already demonstrated, in the years following the turn of the twentieth century, by a more general deconstruction of perspective "[...] by Cézanne, Picasso, Braque and not less important ideological deconstruction with the introduction of new terms".[50] We also know the crucial role that the art historian Nikodim P. Kondakov /ILL. 11/,

48 Fabian HEFFERMEHL, "Wi-Fi in Plato's Cave: The Digital Icon and the Phenomenology of Surveillance", in *Digital Orthodoxy in the Post-Soviet World. The Russian Orthodox Church and Web 2.0,* Mikhail SUSLOV ed., Stuttgart 2015, pp. 83–110, sp. p. 96.

49 On these questions, see FOLETTI, "L'exposition" (n. 30); *idem, From Byzantium* (n. 3), pp. 85–169. The title of the English edition highlights this notion of "Invention of the Icon" which is one of the epicentres of Kondakov's heritage; see also Geraldine LEARDI, "'Tout est dans la mesure': Matisse davanti alle icone russe nel 1911", in *La Russie et l'Occident* (n. 30), pp. 11–30; Rémi LABRUSSE, "Byzance et l'art moderne. La référence byzantine dans les cercles artistiques d'avant-garde au début du xxe siècle", in *Présence de Byzance* (n. 7), pp. 55–89.

50 HEFFERMEHL, "Wi-Fi" (n. 48), p. 96; François-René MARTIN, "Le moine--peintre et le primitif. L'invention des 'Primitifs' russes dans une perspective internationale", *Cahiers du monde russe,* LIII/2–3 = *L'invention de la Sainte Russie: l'idée, les mots et les images* (2012), pp. 1–11; FOLETTI, "L'exposition" (n. 30).

Grabar's professor, played in this rediscovery of medieval Russian art and specifically the "traditional" form of the icon.[51] It is further interesting to note that in the years 1915 to 1922, when the third volume of Kondakov's *Ikonografija Bogomateri* [Iconography of the Mother of God] was being completed, Grabar was in Sofia with Kondakov. In this volume, dedicated to the iconography of the *Theotokos* in Italy from the twelfth to the sixteenth century, Kondakov wrote much that was in harmony with the judgments and theories of Florensky, especially on the role of Giotto in the loss of the canons established by the Second Nicaean council (787) and the progressive integration of the *perspectiva artificalis* in "Western" art.[52] Giotto is indeed often credited by the earliest historiographers such as Cennino Cennini, Lorenzo Ghiberti, or Giorgio Vasari, with the surpassing of the old *maniera Graeca* and the opening to a "modern" way of painting. On the contrary, Kondakov's judgment defended a strongly orthodox point of view.[53] In the book, he characterised Giotto as being "unable" to paint true devotional image, icons. This is in particular true for figures, but more so in the figuration of spaces, which he describes prior to Florensky, but in very similar terms, as a "theatrical mise-en-scène" good for dec-

51 Foletti, *From Byzantium* (n. 3), pp. 85–169.

52 On the theology of image, see Christoph von Schönborn, *L'icône du Christ. Fondements théologiques élaborés entre le Ier et le IIe Concile de Nicée (325–787)*, Fribourg 1976; for a historiographical perspective on Nicaea II and icons, see Gilbert Dagron, *Décrire et peindre. Essai sur le portrait iconique*, Paris 2007, pp. 65–82; more closely relating to perspective, I would also like to point out to the rich pages of Jean Clair, *Méduse. Contribution à une anthropologie des arts visuels*, Paris 1989, pp. 89–104.

53 Ivan Foletti, "Nikodim Pavlovitch Kondakov, *Iconographie de la mère de Dieu*: le manuscrit retrouvé", in Nikodim Kondakov, *Iconographie de la mère de Dieu*, Roma 2011, pp. XXXIX–XLVI.





ILL. 11
Nikodim P. Kondakov surrounded by friends and students, on the back, fourth from the left André Grabar, 1921

›rative works but not the pious contemplation of images.[54] ›ccording to Kondakov, the Italian Renaissance had certainly ›rought good painters, but also an apparent decadence of ›rue" and "efficient" religious artforms and cultic images.[55] It › thus clear that it were not only ideas and a general "aesthet-›" rediscovery which emigrated to the West with scholars

FOLETTI, "Nikodim Pavlovitch Kondakov" (n. 53), p. XLIII.

On anti-Renaissance orthodox sentiment, see Vittorio STRADA, "Icona e anti-›ona. Armonia e caos nella spiritualità russa", in *Il mondo e il sovra-mondo dell'i-›na,* Sante GRACIOTTI ed., Florence 1998, pp. 71–81.

and avant-garde painters, but also, with figures quickly bridging the two worlds like André Grabar, a profound historical knowledge and perception of cultic images.[56] This knowledge was, furthermore, indissociably linked with religious contexts and practices surrounding them.

I would like to mention one last uncanny link between Plotinus' thought and the Russian icon. When Grabar writes that this "[...] more abstract language of art had to bend to defined conventions" in order to deliver its direct efficacity, he speaks about the fixation of iconographic traits and visual elements in a very similar way envisaged by the Greek and Russian orthodox iconographic traditions. These strict, dogmatic elements, which seem so diametrically opposed to the notion of individual inspiration of the artist that was promoted since the early modern period, had already struck Adolphe-Napoléon Didron (1806–1867) when he discovered the icon ateliers at Mount Athos in 1839.[57] The shaping of the languages "spoken" by cult images, especially in the earliest phases of their development, were of deep interest to André Grabar, who made it his life's work to understand

56 Ivan Foletti, "Nikodim Pavlovitch Kondakov et Prague: comment l'émigration change l'histoire (de l'art)", *Opuscula historiae artium*, LXIII (2014), pp. 2–10.

57 *Manuel d'iconographie chrétienne grecque et latine*, intr. and notes by Adolphe-Napoléon Didron, transl. Paul Durand, Paris 1845, pp. XII–XVII. See Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult. Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, Munich 1990, pp. 28–30; see also Catherine Brisac, Jean-Michel Leniaud, "Adolphe-Napoléon Didron ou les média au service de l'art chrétien", *Revue de l'art*, LXXVII (1987), pp. 33–42; Ivan Foletti, "Tra classicismi e avanguardie. La ricezione dell'estetica bizantina in Francia e in Russia a cavallo tra Otto e Novecento", in *Phantazontes: visioni dell'arte bizantina*, Valentina Cantone, Silvia Pedone eds, Padua 2013, pp. 175–255.

these languages.[58] Again, in Plotinus (but these are ideas already present in Plato and Plutarch), he found a perfect description of what images should aim for:

> It is what the Egyptians had understood, writing not with letters forming sounds and sentences, but with signs *of which each is a science*, a wisdom, a real thing *grasped at once*, and not a reasoning or deliberation. [p. x, v, 8, 5]

The very idea of the use of Egyptian scripture resonates with the thinking of another important protagonist of the debates around the rediscovery the Russian icon, the theologian and philosopher Sergej Nikolaevič Bulgakov (1871–1944) /ILL. 10/.[59] The latter, some years after Florensky, in a text from 1930 on the veneration of the icon, wrote:

> Things without prototype are blind (naturalism). And prototypes without things are empty or abstract (schematism). The creative act of art, making an icon of something, consists first of all in perceiving its prototype through it, and then imprinting it through its own means. *Icons are a hieroglyph of the ideal prototype*, not a repetition or a copy [...], but rather the imprint of the authentic, first image

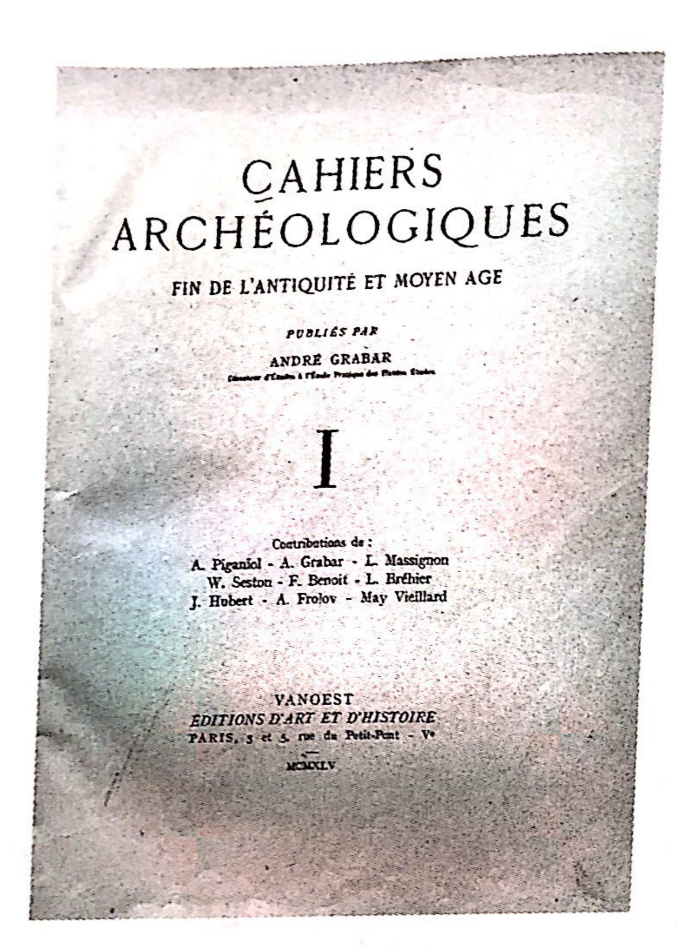
which, through the representation of it, has a real prototype in the world.[60]

Very significantly, we can see how Bulgakov's statement enters in resonance with the philosophical thought of Plotinus. Bulgakov himself had written on the Greek philosopher on some occasions, but it is here specifically the link with the question of the Incarnation, once again the real presence as opposed to the illusion, that must be emphasised and reframed in Grabar's thought.[61]

As representations of a true reality, icons – just as the first Christian art for Grabar – called on the one hand for a detachment from the materiality, on the other attached the presence of the sacred to this very materiality. In his studies on the notions of the power, presence or agency of Late Antique and medieval images, Grabar – whilst being very broad in his approach – remained focused on the veneration of images such as icons, making theophany and hierophany possible, and on the understanding of the religious phenomena linked with images, throughout his life. Grabar, as a painter himself, may have been even more sensitive to the question of how to achieve a certain vision by using material tools – and not only in cult-images. It is perhaps in this fascination for the potency of the image, its possibility to materialise a true

60 Sergei BULGAKOV, *Ikona i Ikonopočitanie. Dogmatičeskij očerk* [The icon and its veneration. A dogmatic overview], Paris 1931; French ed.: *L'icône et sa vénération. Aperçu dogmatique*, trans. by Constantin E. ANDRONIKOF, Lausanne 1996; transl. here to English by Sarah MELKER from FOLETTI, *From Byzantium* (n. 3), p. 143, my emphasis.

61 Bulgakov writes on the Plotinian conception of the vision of matter in his *Svet nevechernij* [Unfading Light] 1917, pp. 245–247. Transl. in Sergei BULGAKOV, *Towards a Russian Political Theology*, Rowan WILLIAMS ed., pp. 113–162, sp. p. 128.


CAHIERS
ARCHÉOLOGIQUES

FIN DE L'ANTIQUITÉ ET MOYEN AGE

PUBLIÉS PAR

ANDRÉ GRABAR

I

Contributions de :
A. Piganiol - A. Grabar - L. Massignon
W. Seston - F. Benoit - L. Bréhier
J. Hubert - A. Frolov - May Vieillard

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ILL. 12

Frontpage of the first issue of the *Cahiers Archéologiques*, 1945

vision, inserted within this briefly sketched intellectual frame, that the Russian origins and formation years of Grabar could shed some light on his understanding of ancient religious art.

A MANIFESTO FOR THE *CAHIERS ARCHÉOLOGIQUES*

The article translated here must also be considered in the context of its publication. As the first article written by André Grabar in the first issue of the *Cahiers Archéologiques* he had founded in 1945, the text has programmatic value /ILL. 12/. The text is one of Grabar's three first published articles in the very first issue of the *Cahiers Archéologiques* and

is accompanied by two other essays – one on Syrian liturgy, the other on Visigothic frescoes – testifying to an underlying wish of "uniting" the Eastern and Western medieval world.[62] Furthermore, the article on Plotinus not only speaks about the images' capacity to offer a passage from the sensible to the intelligible, but also suggests a way of looking at images, maybe, if I may suggest, as a way to reopen the "inner eyes" to beauty after the times of the war.

Despite the fact that French Byzantinists, as Grabar himself noted, were far from idle during the Occupation and the War, the founding of a periodical in 1945 strikes as a significant gesture.[63] The article on Plotinian vision must then also be read as an open invitation to discover and rediscover topics and images that would be presented throughout the pages of the periodical. Further, as noted in a review of the first issue by Pierre Courcelle, the new journal, with its eloquent subtitle *Fin de l'Antiquité et Moyen Âge* [End of Antiquity and the Middle Ages] arrived just on point to fill a gap, since it also allowed a focus on this "long-neglected" moment of transition between Antiquity and the Middle Ages.[64] But it did so as well because at the very heart of the enterprise lay what we would now call a deeply interdisciplinary approach. The *Cahiers Archéologiques* proposed to give a large place to "[...] archaeological investigations which

62 André Grabar, "Une fresque visigothique et l'iconographie du silence", *Cahiers Archéologiques*, I (1945), pp. 124–128; *idem*, "Les ambons Syriens et la fonction liturgique de la nef dans les églises antiques", *ibidem*, pp. 129–133.

63 On French Byzantine studies during the war, see André Grabar, "La byzantinologie française pendant la guerre: 1940–1945", *Byzantion*, XVII (1944–1945), pp. 431–438.

64 Pierre Courcelle, "Review of: *Cahiers archéologiques, fin de l'Antiquité et Moyen-Âge*, t. 1; publiés par A. Grabar, 1945", *Revue des Études Anciennes*, XLVIII/3–4 (1946), pp. 298–300.

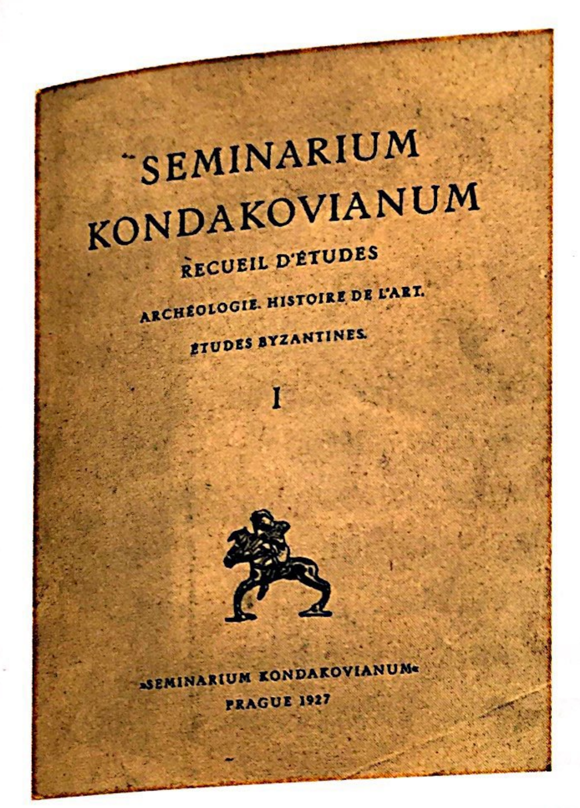
will consider artistic documents as testimonies on the history of ideas and religious beliefs".[65] In this, once again, we can recognise André Grabar's characteristic methodology, and his deep interest for the religious factor behind monuments: artworks without a function were only of marginal interest within this approach.

The *Cahiers Archéologiques* became, in a short period of time, one of the leading publications in the field of medieval art history and are still published today. In 1952, Grabar had integrated Jean Hubert (1902–1994) to the *Cahiers*, who was not at all a Byzantinist, further opening the journal to works on the "Western" world.[66] In this sense, the role of the journal was not unlike the one which was held by another periodical, founded during the Interwar period by other students of Kondakov, also émigrés, in Prague: *Seminarium Kondakovianum*, bearing the same name as the institute in Prague, and published for the first time in 1927 /ILL. 13/.[67] It is

65 COURCELLE, "Review of: *Cahiers archéologiques*" (n. 64), p. 298.

66 On Hubert, see Alain ERLANDE-BRANDENBURG, "Jean Hubert (1902–1994)", *Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes*, CLIII/2 (1995), pp. 583–588.

67 See Zuzana SKÁLOVÁ, "Das Prager Seminarium Kondakovianum, später das Archäologische Kondakov-Institut und sein Archiv (1925–1952), *Slavica Gandensia*, XVIII (1991), pp. 21–43; Jiří ROHÁČEK, "The Archive of the Institute of N. P. Kondakov", *Convivium*, I/1 (2014), pp. 219–221; Francesco LOVINO, "Leafing through Seminarium Kondakovianum, I. Studies on Byzantine Illumination", *Convivium*, III/1 (2016), pp. 206–213; Ivan FOLETTI, "Nikodim Kondakov, Russia and Czechoslovakia. Byzantine Studies, the Link between East and West", in *From Kondakov to Hans Belting Library. Emigration and Byzantium – Bridges between Worlds*, Ivan FOLETTI, Francesco LOVINO, Veronika TVRZNÍKOVÁ eds, Brno 2018, pp. 18–37; esp. Francesco LOVINO, "*Seminarium Kondakovianum, Byzantinoslavica*. A Comparison", *ibidem*, pp. 38–55; See also Marina DMITRIEVA, "Towards a Transnational History of Russian Culture: The N. P. Kondakov Institute in Prague", in *Transcending the Borders of Countries, Languages, and Disciplines in Russian Émigré Culture*, Christoph FLAMM [*et al.*] eds, Cambridge 2018, pp. 173–198.



ILL. 13
Frontpage of the first issue of *Seminarium Kondakovianum*, 1927

in this sense no surprise that just five years after the last issue of *Seminarium* in 1940 and after the war, the *Cahiers* took up the flame, proposing a new interdisciplinary journal and platform of discussion between East and West.

WHY TRANSLATE?

Before leaving the reader to the discovery or rediscovery of the text, I would like to underline why seventy-three years after its original publication and twenty-eight years after the passing of its author (1990), this short essay of André Grabar might make sense more than ever.

Firstly, the topics that Grabar touched upon in this article are at the core of art historical research. In a world where digitised images are omnipresent, the deeper understanding

of the notion of presence within images – what has been defined for example by Hans Belting as "iconic presence" – seems on the one hand fundamental.[68] On the other hand, the corpus of Grabar opens to questions that have become integral to studies on the potentialities of images within a more and more anthropological approach: notions such as the representation of the intelligible, spiritual seeing, eyes of the mind, theophanic visions and their expectations in Late Antiquity but also a questioning of the ontological status of images, emphasised by Grabar through the lens of Plotinus, have become topical issues of Late Antique and medieval art history.[69] Furthermore, Grabar was in general questioning the power of images, in their capacity to act on us, and in us, but also, not only in religious contexts, to become as such

68 BELTING, *Bild und Kult* (n. 57); *idem*, *Bild-Anthropologie. Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft*, Munich 2001; *idem*, "Iconic Presence. Images in Religious Traditions", *Material Religion*, XII/2 (2016), pp. 235–237. See Roland BETANCOURT, "Medieval Art after Duchamp: Hans Belting's *Likeness and Presence* at 25", *Gesta*, LV/1 (2016), pp. 5–17; on presence in representations and artefacts, see also the comprehensive overview in the volume *Presence. The Inherence of the Prototype within Images and Other Objects*, Robert MANIURA, Rupert SHEPHERD eds, Aldershot 2006, esp. the introduction with bibliography, pp. 1–30. The question of Belting's conception of the *Kultbild*, the cult-image, has been widely discussed since the 1990s. See *Intellektualisierung und Mystifizierung mittelalterlicher Kunst. "Kultbild": Revision eines Begriffs*, Martin BÜCHSEL, Rebecca MÜLLER eds, Berlin 2010.

69 Herbert L. KESSLER, *Spiritual Seeing. Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art*, Philadelphia 2000; *Seeing the Invisible in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Giselle DE NIE, Karl F. MORRISON eds, Turnhout 2005; *The Mind's Eye. Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, Jeffrey F. HAMBURGER, Anne-Marie BOUCHÉ eds, Princeton 2006; *Looking Beyond. Visions, Dreams and Insights in Medieval Art and History*, Colum HOURIHANE ed., Princeton, NJ 2010; Caroline Walker BYNUM, *Christian Materiality; An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*, New York 2011; Tobias FRESE, *Aktual- und Realpräsenz. Das eucharistische Christusbild von der Spätantike bis ins Mittelalter*, Berlin 2013; Armin F. BERGMEIER, *Visionserwartung. Visualisierung und Präsenzerfahrung des Göttlichen in der Spätantike*, Wiesbaden 2017.

"embodied".[70] Choosing an approach that was not only formalist, Grabar opened the door to a different understanding of what was often considered a failure in rendering illusionism, addressing new questions to the "first" medieval images, specifically to the perception and use of cultic images.[71] Driven by his background and interests, Grabar wrote about how to look at images, paving the way to a new understanding of the gaze. In this sense, he also indirectly pointed to the interaction of the beholder with artworks, to the relationships between images and religious behaviours, the performative aspects of images, and towards the "iconic" and "synaesthetic" turns of the discipline, which demonstrate a gradual emancipation from pure visuality still expressed in Grabar's article.[72]

Finally, in his description of a certain model of "behaviour" towards images, Grabar had a far-reaching eye. It led him to Palmyra, as he described a sculptural relief depicting a group of veiled women. In this rhythmical composition, executed in a peculiar style, he saw an art "[...] which foreshadows, it seems, the characters of Romanesque sculpture". This relief

70 Most famously, FREEDBERG, *The Power* (n. 24); for other approaches, for example Horst BREDEKAMP, *Theorie des Bildakts: Frankfurter Adorno-Vorlesungen 2007*, Berlin 2010.

71 David HORNUFF, *Bildwissenschaft im Widerstreit: Belting, Boehm, Bredekamp, Burda*, Munich 2012.

72 Bissera V. PENTCHEVA, *The Sensual Icon. Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium*, University Park, pp. 209–210; *eadem*, "Glittering Eyes: Animation in the Byzantine *Eikōn* and the Western *Imago*", *Codex Aquilarensis*, XXXII (2016), pp. 209–236. See also the important studies of Alexej M. LIDOV, *Ierotopia: sozdanie sakral'nyx prostranstv v Vizatnii i Drevnej Rusi = Hierotopy: The Creation of Sacred Spaces in Byzantium and Medieval Russia*, Moscow 2006. For a convenient overview of the question, see *Iconic Turn: Die Neue Macht der Bilder*, Hubert BURDA, Christa MAAR eds, Cologne 2004; Keith MOXEY, "Visual Studies and the Iconic Turn", *Journal of Visual Culture*, VII/2 (2008), pp. 131–146.

was sculpted on the portico surrounding the cella of the temple of Bel in Palmyra and was dynamited by the so-called Islamic State on the 28th of August 2015 /ILL. 14/.[73] In the conclusion of an essay published as an echo to the destructions in Palmyra, the historian Paul Veyne described the sculptures and reminded us that:

> [...] they were much discussed in the times of Malraux and the great archaeologists of the day: of course, we must mention the contemporary boldness of avant-garde painters and the beginnings of abstract art. What is probable, in any case, is that in Palmyra, the sculptor, standing before the many stylisations made possible by Orient and Occident, took the opportunity to entertain himself by inventing a new one.[74]

And indeed, the article of Grabar should, in these years, be reframed in the context of André Malraux and his impact on the French intellectual world.[75] It seems that through the gaze of Plotinus, Grabar was in a sense also looking at a personal "imaginary museum" of images, composed within his own historiographical gaze, his own *Univers des formes* /ILLS. 15–16/ – a link which is of course not only abstract, since Grabar wrote two volumes of the famous collection directed by Malraux, both on Late Antiquity and early Byz-

73 Christiane DELPLACE, "Palmyre", *Perspective. Actualité en histoire de l'art*, 1 (2017), pp. 9–12.

74 Paul VEYNE, *Palmyre. L'irremplaçable trésor*, Paris 2015, p. 141; translated as: *Palmyra. An Irreplaceable Treasure*, transl. Teresa L. FAGAN, Chicago 2017.

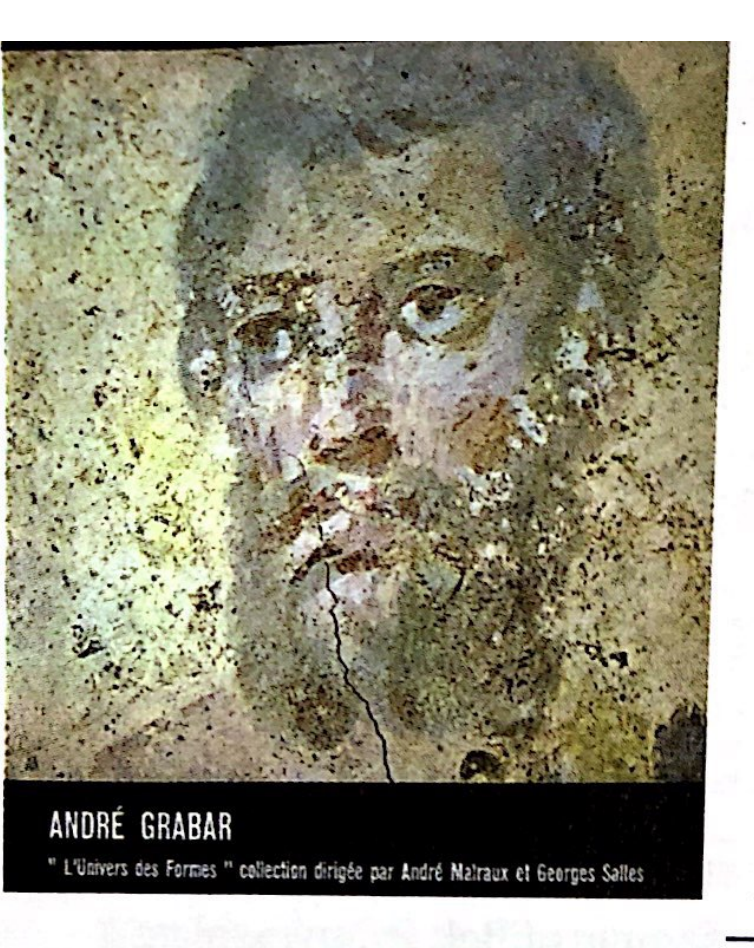
75 Walter GRASSKAMP, *André Malraux und das imaginäre Museum. Die Weltkunst im Salon*, Munich 2014.

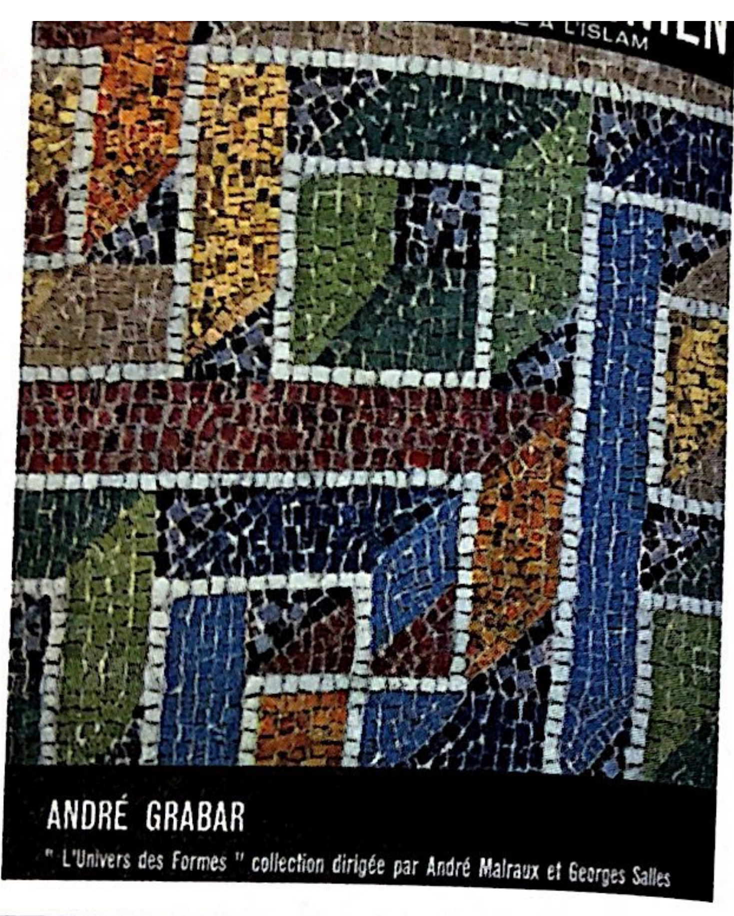


ILL. 14
Temple of Bel, Palmyra, plate from *La Syrie antique et médiévale illustrée*, René Dussaud, Paul Deschamps, Henri Seyrig eds, Paris 1931

antine art.[76] He considered medieval art to be a dialogue, a dialogue with images but also, such as his guide Plotinus, a dialogue with oneself. As an émigré, Grabar did not seem to express much resentment towards exile, nor did he seem to withdraw to an inner retreat, perhaps because he knew so many different cultures of the medieval and Late Antique worlds. Once again in the words of Paul Veyne, "truly, to know and have the wish to know only one culture, one's own, is to condemn oneself to live under a candle snuffer."[77]

76 André GRABAR, *Le premier art Chrétien*, Paris 1966; *idem, L'Âge d'or de Justinien. De la mort de Théodose à l'Islam*, Paris 1966.
77 VEYNE, *Palmyre* (n. 74), p. 141; see also Finbarr Barry FLOOD, "Between Cult and Culture: Bamiyan, Islamic Iconoclasm, and the Museum", *The Art Bulletin*, LXXXIV/4 (2002), pp. 641–659.





ILLS 15–16

Covers of André Grabar, *Le premier art chrétien*, Paris 1966 and *L'âge d'or de Justinien*, Paris 1966; collection "L'Univers des formes"

To conclude in the same direction, I can only speak of translation (and reproduction) as the means to fight the